DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 725 EA 024 168

TITLE Right in the Middle.
INSTITUTION Illinois State Board of Education, Springfield.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 22p.; For a related document, see EA 024 258.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Cooperative Planning; Educational Innovation; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; *Preadolescents; School Restructuring; State Action; *Statewide Planning
IDENTIFIERS *Illinois

ABSTRACT

Plans for transforming middle-level schools in Illinois are described in this report, which serves as a guiding document for creating middle-level schools that acknowledge the needs of early adolescence. The report, facilitated by a Carnegie report entitled "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century," describes early adolescence, the plan's principles and objectives, vision, and goals. Task force recommendations and suggested activities, based on findings of a statewide survey of schools with grades 5-8, involve the following issues: resource allocation; professional development; training and recruiting special teachers; utilizing the governor's office as the lead agency; collective agenda setting; family involvement; and planning for community/school interaction. Appendices include a description of the background of the report and lists of advisory board and task force members. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

CH

ED 302 425

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. G. Gill

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 021 168

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Right in the Middle

This publication is made possible in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Carnegie Corporation of New York is not responsible for any statements or views expressed in this document.

1992

Illinois State Board of Education

Louis Mervis, Chairman
State Board of Education

Robert Leininger
State Superintendent of Education

Right in the Middle

Right in the Middle is the planning document for the transformation of education for young adolescents in Illinois. The document speaks of creating middle-level schools that acknowledge and celebrate the divergent needs of early adolescence. It is a document about the character of schooling for students in the middle of growing up.

Right in the Middle is the guiding document for the reform and transformation of schools serving students ages ten to fourteen. It explains the place, purpose and potential of middle-level education in our state's future. The implementation of the ideas in this document will challenge schools and communities to work in greater unity for the welfare of all young adolescents in Illinois.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE TODAY

In the phases of a lifetime, some stages of development are milestones on the way to growing up. For young children and their parents, there is the excitement of first steps, first words or beginning days of schooling. For young adults, there is the excitement of being independent and having their first job or apartment. Each signals important changes. ♦ Early adolescence is one of those times. The young person is caught between childhood and adulthood. There is the quest for independence amidst the desire for security. There is craving for status with peers, while longing for adult attention. There is the confusion about the ambiguities of the world, yet excitement at the wonder of it all. There is striving for self-respect and dignity during anxious moments of self-doubt. There is curiosity about life and growing up. Early adolescence is the milestone that bridges childhood to adulthood.

"I think the needs of kids today have increased."
Tiffany, Age 12

Profile of Today's Students

- When Jennifer was in sixth grade, her family returned to Illinois to stay with her grandmother. Jennifer did not want to leave her school. She loved it there and received straight A's for her work. Her parents had lost their jobs and their house, too. For two months, they lived in their station wagon. Even as a seventh grader, she remains angry and bitter, but tries to keep her mind on her school work. It is hard. She is having trouble making friends. Her parents argue daily and tell her that they would have less trouble if she hadn't been born. She often cries and thinks of running away.

- Cory is in eighth grade. Last year he did well in school and was liked by his teachers and classmates. Over the summer he started hanging around with two buddies. He began coming home late and drew away from his mom. His mom works two jobs and does not get home from work until 9:00 p.m. most nights. Cory's grades have dropped. He is not doing his homework, is sleeping in classes, and is getting in trouble at school.

- Maria tries very hard at school. She is a hard worker. This quarter she received her first "A" ever on a report card. She has some friends, but no best friends. She stays after school every day just to help her teacher. While working after school yesterday, her teacher asked how Maria's mom had liked her report card. Maria replied, "She's too busy to care."

- Crystal is late for school nearly every day if she comes at all. She rarely smiles and appears angry. Her mom is about to have her ninth child. Two of her siblings died in a house fire, two older brothers are in jail, and her older sister had a baby last month. The teachers talk with Crystal about trying her best and the importance of going to school. She just stares at them and continues to fail.

- Joe's parents have always thought him to be smarter than the other students. They make certain he is in all the honors classes. Joe participates in gymnastics three nights a week, attends Boy Scouts and Youth Club at church, and goes for tutoring in accelerated mathematics. His dad dreams of his going to an elite college. Joe worries that he is not good enough.

It is no secret that societal pressures and demographic shifts have created complex problems for education. Students face mounting challenges in a social support system much different from that of previous decades. They are growing up in environments where they may be forced at a younger age to make potentially fateful decisions with less adult guidance than in earlier generations. ♦ The profiles of today's eighth graders are diverse. Figures from the 1988 Descriptive Summary of American Eighth Graders show that:

- 71% are white, 13% are black, 10% are Hispanic, 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% are American Indian or Alaskan Native.

- 75% are enrolled in middle schools or junior high schools.

- 18% have repeated at least one grade.

- The typical student watches TV 21.4 hours per week and spends 5.6 hours doing homework.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- 14% report being home alone for 3 or more hours most evenings.

- 30% of Hispanics, blacks, and American Indians are not proficient at the basic level.

Overall, a little over half of the students have no risk factors for failure (53%), 26% have one risk factor, and 20% have two or more. Risk factors are identified as coming from a single-parent family, living in a family with an income of less than $15,000, being home alone for more than 3 hours a day, having parents who did not receive a high school degree, having a sibling who dropped out of school, and coming from a limited-English-proficient background. ♦ These students will have to survive in the world of the future. The information age will require adults who can constantly retool and re-educate themselves. Success in the work place of the future will depend on their capacity to continue learning throughout life. Students today must become proficient and knowledgeable in techniques for accessing, manipulating, analyzing, and utilizing information.

What Does It Mean to Be Right in the Middle?

For most, the time of early adolescence is itself a period of higher vulnerability. Students are in the middle of changing from children to young adults. They are developing crucial attitudes concerning self, school and society that will affect their future. It is a time of paradoxes. They yearn for independence while craving adult attention and limits. They dream of the future while forgetting about present responsibilities. They speak of human virtues and kindness, while ridiculing other classmates. They want to say "no" to temptations, while giving in to peer pressure. The pathway to adulthood twists and winds through perils and pleasures. Some proceed along the pathway with relative ease. Others stumble repeatedly at each obstacle. There is no "right way" to be in the middle. ♦ Young adolescents in Illinois were presented with an opportunity to express their opinions on being in the middle. When asked what they believe students need, several of the more than two thousand students responded with the following:

- I need someone to talk to. Somebody who cares. People who will listen and help. Someone who will try to make things right and see things from a kid's view.

- I think that the most important needs of kids in our age group are that of knowing you belong, a sense of yourself being different from everybody but still an important member of the team. Kids need to feel well-adjusted at school, comfortable with the teachers and fellow students.

- Acceptance is very important to middle school kids. We need to feel like we belong, to be secure.

- I think kids my age have a need to be successful. Whenever there is a big test and I pass it with flying colors, I feel happy and warm inside.

- My friends and I need a place where everyone can be good to each other.

"It seems like kids have more needs than we're meeting."
Focus Group Participant

What do adults concerned about early adolescent development say students need? Hundreds of persons from throughout Illinois addressed that issue in a week-long series of Focus Groups. These 600 interested adults spoke of students needing attention and recognition in a place that promotes a sense of belonging and safety. They believe students need to build self-esteem through significant contact with adults who know them and know them well. Students need relevance in what they are learning in schools and must "learn-how-to-learn" through active engagement in their education. These adults expressed the opinion that students need time to think and grow in confidence about what they can do and accomplish within a school that accommodates the full range of early adolescent developmental needs. Above all, they believe students deserve a school setting that is responsive to these changing social, emotional, intellectual and physical needs.

"Children come first and decisions should center around children."
Focus Group Participant

"Kids may not remember what we teach them, but they will remember how we treat them."
Focus Group Participant

"Young adolescents need to see themselves as valued members of a group that offers mutual support and trusting relationships. They need to be able to succeed at something and to be praised and rewarded for that success. They need to become socially competent individuals who have the skills to cope successfully with everyday life. They need to believe that they have a promising future and need the competence to take advantage of real opportunities in a society in which they have a stake."
Turning Points

The Reason for Right in the Middle

Educational programs and reforms have been focused on elementary and secondary schools. Because of this perspective, middle-level schools or junior high schools have most often been joined together with the secondary

programs. As a result, there has been an unintentional neglect of services and programs created for the middle level. ♦ Being in the middle has had no distinction of its own. An image of the middle as a less than important level of schooling has persisted. Teachers have felt overlooked and undervalued. For many, teaching in the middle was only necessary until a more valued position became available at a higher level. Appropriate schooling practices for the middle level were assumed to be a replication of the high school. People did not consider what was best for early adolescent education. What was "right for the middle" was not important. ♦ The status of middle-level education has changed dramatically in just a few short years. This area of education is now discussed and debated as to its merits and liabilities. Early adolescence is being recognized as a crucial time in life when future hopes and patterns for success or failure are etched into a young person's character. For many students, particularly those in high-risk categories, it is viewed as the last, best chance for effecting positive change for a productive future.

Middle-level education is receiving this unprecedented attention thanks in large part to the release of the Carnegie Report entitled *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. This national report confronts the growing problems and concerns of early adolescence and recommends eight broad actions that schools and communities need to take to reform middle-grade education for the benefit of all ten-to-fourteen-year-olds.

- ***Create small communities for learning*** where stable, close, mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual development and personal growth. The key elements of these communities are schools-within-schools, or houses; students and teachers grouped together as teams; and small group advisories that ensure that every student is known well by at least one adult.

- ***Teach a core academic program*** that results in students who are literate, including in the sciences, and who know how to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society. Youth service to promote values for citizenship is an essential part of the core academic program.

- ***Ensure success for all students*** through elimination of tracking by achievement level and promotion of cooperative learning, flexibility in arranging instructional time, and adequate resources (time, space, equipment, and materials) for teachers.

- ***Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students*** through creative control by teachers over the instructional program linked to greater responsibilities for students' performance, governance committees that assist the principal in designing and coordinating school-wide programs, and autonomy and leadership within sub-schools, or houses, to create environments tailored to enhance the intellectual and emotional development of all youth.

- ***Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents*** and who have been specially prepared for assignment to the middle grades.

- ***Improve academic performance through fostering the health and fitness*** of young adolescents by providing a health coordinator in every middle grade school, access to health care and counseling services, and a health-promoting school environment.

- ***Reengage families in the education of young adolescents*** by giving families meaningful roles in school governance, communicating with families about the school program and student's progress, and offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at the school.

- ***Connect schools with communities***, which together share responsibility for each middle grade student's success, through identifying service opportunities in the community, establishing partnerships and collaborations to ensure students' access to health and social services, and using community resources to enrich the instructional program and opportunities for constructive after-school activities.

Turning Points is the point of departure for *Right in the Middle*. Its voice of consciousness drove the Middle Grades Task Force to think about the status of middle-level education in Illinois, to examine the indicators of the future, and to painstakingly take stock of what schools in the middle must do to ensure success for every student. The face and condition of middle-level education must change. A united effort is necessary to transform the educational experiences for young adolescents.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Who Is Responsible for Doing What Is Right for the Middle?

Determining the important outcomes for all young adolescents is too critical to be left to one group alone. To prepare students well for a place in an ever-changing society of the future, many groups have responsibility for guiding every young adolescent along the right pathway. At the center is the family unit where support and attention are vital foundations for healthy young adolescent growth. The power of the family is immeasurable.

> ***"I think kids need love, support and encouragement from their families. A close relationship helps us feel happy. Being happy is probably the most important thing to a kid our age."***
> *Heather, Age 13*

The schooling picture is broad in its scope. Next to home, school is where students spend the largest amount of time. Naturally, all educators directly involved in early adolescent education are accountable for creating schools conducive to students' growth. But the commitment goes beyond the walls of schools serving students ages ten to fourteen. Individual districts and school boards must commit to a strong, respected middle-level program. Both elementary and secondary schools must come to value the contributions that an exemplary middle-level school can provide. ♦ Involvement of health and social service agencies, businesses and industries, and youth-servicing agencies is instrumental in the development of the healthy young adolescent. Collaboration with the schools is important. ♦ Support of institutions of higher education, state agencies, and the legislature is equally significant. Local entities can act more decisively when they have visible support. The Illinois State Board of Education, in particular through its endorsement of this document, leads by example, setting the pace for accomplishing what is right for the middle years of schooling in the State.

Principles Guiding Right in the Middle

Illinois' transformed middle-level schools will embrace several essential principles if they are to be truly schools of the future.

1. In the middle-level schools, emphasis must be on the development of the whole child and on the insurance of success for every student within the school.

2. The needs of the students must drive the structure and organization of schools. The schools will be places that promote active engagement of students, personalized education, respect and curiosity and that celebrate differences through a core curriculum shared by all students.

3. Shared decision making will work to set high expectations for students who not only are attempting to find their way through today's problems, but will have to succeed in tomorrow's technological world.

4. These schools will know and understand their purposes as special schools for young adolescents and will be committed to accomplishing their purposes.

The Outcomes of Right in the Middle

What is the ultimate purpose of changing schools at the middle level? Each community needs young persons who can eventually take their places as responsible citizens of the future. ♦ Illinois Middle Grades Task Force concurs with *Turning Points* and wants every student upon leaving the middle years of schooling to be:

- an intellectually reflective person. The student will be maturing intellectually with the capacity to analyze, examine and generate solutions to problems and issues. The student should exhibit this capacity by mastering forms of self-expression and communication within an environment that appreciates and understands differences.

- a person enroute to a lifetime of meaningful work. The student will learn to learn and will understand work as a means of subsistence, but more significantly, as a source of one's identity.

- a good citizen. The student will accept responsibility for shaping the civic future of her/his community, understand the basic values and development and operation of our society, and grow in understanding of global citizenship.

- a caring and ethical individual. The young person will know and act upon what is good or right. He or she will embrace ethical principles and work toward establishing and maintaining relationships.

- a healthy person. The young adult will develop a self-image of competence and strength through the acquisition of both psychologically and mentally healthy lifestyles. Healthy coping skills will help to ensure the chances for success in the rapidly changing world.

These outcomes are desired for all children. Every young adolescent is important, and every child must have the opportunity to develop the capacity to achieve these goals.

"Kids my age need equal attention and opportunity in all classes, a well-organized curriculum, up-to-date resources and supplies for classes and reference use, and a fair, equal system of learning."
Heather, Age 11

The Middle Level School of the Future

Illinois' transformed middle-level schools will be places that embrace the joy of learning and celebrate diversity for all students. A sense of community will prevail as schools are reorganized around the concepts of interdisciplinary teams, houses and advisory programs. Curriculum will be age-appropriate and integrated with students actively engaged in the learning process. Teachers will be experts at working with young adolescents and will have had specialized middle-level training. Skills such as learning-to-learn, decision making, problem solving, and social and life skills will permeate content areas, responding to the accelerating pace of technology. Students will have ample opportunities for extended exploration and involvement with emphasis on participation, rather than on competition. Schools will work in conjunction with parents and community members to ensure the success of each individual.

Illinois Prairie Middle-Level School
A Glimpse into the Future

Michael likes coming to school these days. He feels happy in the morning because he gets to see his good friends and his teachers seem pleasant and happy. It is not at all like his old school. Here at Illinois Prairie Middle-Level School things are done differently. At first, he was not quite sure he would like it. It is not easy getting used to something new, but school makes more sense now. It is even fun! ♦ Michael is on the Prairie Pioneer team. He has four teachers on his team. They teach him all his subjects. He thinks his teachers are special. They seem to really enjoy their work. They are always coming up with interesting activities and projects. They work together well. In fact, they have a special time every day when they meet together to plan things for the Pioneer Team. They keep up with all the kids on the team. Michael has heard that the teachers even talk about their students with other adults from the school during team time. Often parents come in to talk then, too. Michael thinks this must be a pretty good idea because the kids on his team do well. ♦ Anyone who walks through their hallway knows about what the Pioneers do. Their work is up all over. One of his exploratory teachers complimented him on his immigration project that was displayed in the hallway. Michael was surprised that a home economics teacher would know about immigration! Michael has noticed that teachers are always complimenting kids for something. ♦ He likes the fact that all of his classes are so close to each other. Even his locker is right outside his home room classroom. Next year, he will be on the team just down the hallway. Each hallway is called a house, and each house has different grade-level teams within it. He knows the next house's teachers already, so changing to eighth grade next year should be all right.

Michael really likes his classes. They are interesting. The teachers have them doing a lot. He feels like he is always busy. He sometimes works by himself, but more frequently he must work cooperatively with other students. No one is made to feel dumb here. Everyone is thought of as smart and able to learn. He likes the idea that students learn from each other. He wants to learn more this way. His teachers challenge students to think. They keep saying that it is important to learn how to learn and make decisions. Everyone works with computers all the time. When the teachers seem a little confused with how to use them, one of the students even helps them out. ♦ Michael loves the way they learn, too. They still learn about mathematics, language arts, science, social studies and reading, but it is not the same as before. The teachers and students work together on these special things called interdisciplinary units. On the team so far this year, they have studied about exploration through the ages and the courage it takes to confront unknown challenges. Some days the schedule gets changed all around so teachers have more time for one kind of class. It might sound confusing, but it really is pretty easy for students to remember. ♦ Each day they have a time period called advisory. Teachers have a small group of students which is their special group. At first it was awkward getting used to having this kind of time, but now it is OK. Sometimes they do things to get better organized and to work on goals. Other times they talk about what is important to them. Still other times they work to solve problems together and sometimes they do special activities together. Michael likes the individual attention he gets from the teacher and the other kids. ♦ Outside of the team, Michael enjoys all the chances to try lots of different kinds of classes. This year he is taking drama, computer publishing, art, music and home economics. Next year, he gets to have other classes to explore. Two times a year, the whole school does week-long projects called exploratories. ♦ Everyone in the building gets to pick a special class that is offered only for that week. Michael took the magic class and really wants to be in the bowling class next time. In physical education, they are always busy with lots of activities. Even after school, there are many intramural activities. Michael liked cross-country, health advocates, and ping-pong the best so far. His favorite after-school activity is Prairie Helpers. This group spends

lots of time helping others outside the school. It makes him feel good to give a hand to someone else. ♦ What Michael likes best about Illinois Prairie Middle-Level School is that people seem to care about each other, and they help each other do their best. His mother thinks it is a great place, too. She likes all the ways they make coming to school possible. They have special programs for parents where they can learn more about what kids this age are like. The school even coordinates having special services for parents right there at school so families do not have to run all over town to get the help they need. She has found time to help twice a month at the evening homework lab. Michael and his mom are glad they moved. Illinois Prairie Middle-Level School is a great place to learn and grow.

ILLINOIS MIDDLE GRADES TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Why Focus on Middle-Level Education

Is it not true that the State Board of Education is supposed to advocate for all students? Isn't much of what is contained in the recommendations and action statements below applicable to all students? The answer to both questions is a firm yes. Then why focus on young adolescents?

The Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1986 to place the compelling challenges of the adolescent years higher on the nation's agenda. From 1987 to June 1989, the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, chaired by David Hornbeck, studied and examined promising new approaches to fostering the education and healthy development of young adolescents. The result was a ground-breaking report that filled a serious gap in reports on education reform in the 1980's. The report, *Turning Points, Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,* catapulted the issue of addressing the needs of young adolescents into each state's educational agenda. In the spring of 1990, competitive matching grants were made available to all states. Illinois was one of twenty-seven to receive a grant award. The goals of the Illinois grant were to:

1. Prepare a report which defines the state-of-the-art of Illinois middle-level education.

2. Raise awareness through written communication and presentation of the unique needs of middle-level youth.

3. Develop an interagency plan to address early adolescent needs through educational, health and social services reform.

4. Coordinate and incorporate the principles of *Turning Points* in other Illinois restructuring and school improvement initiatives.

Why middle level education? Many young adolescents, generally defined as youth ages 10-14 years of age, enter a period of trial and error, of vulnerability to emotional hurt and humiliation, of anxiety and uncertainty that are sources of unevenness of emotions and behaviors associated with the age. Biologically, young adolescents experience puberty, a period of growth and development more rapid than in any other phase of life except infancy. They begin to look outward from home to gain an understanding of themselves and their circumstances. They are tempted to experiment with drugs and alcohol, and they are bombarded with mixed messages about sex, ideals and values. They assess their prospects and decide how much to invest by staying in school. They face unprecedented choices and pressures often without adult guidance. They are moving from dependency to interdependency with family, friends and others. They are forming their self-concept, their vision of who they are and what they will be.

- Ninety-two percent of the high school class of 1987 began drinking before graduation; of those, 56% had begun drinking in the 6th to 9th grades.

- More and more teenagers below the age of 16 are becoming sexually active. One fourth of all sexually active adolescents will become infected with a sexually transmitted disease before graduating from high school.

- Motor vehicle and other accidents are the leading cause of death among youth 10-14 years of age.

- Over 40% of Hispanics, 33% of blacks and 22% of white 13-year-olds are one or more years below expected grade level.

- An estimated 59% of Hispanic dropouts leave school before completing the 10th grade.

The statistics could go on, but the point is that the middle years are a time when serious decisions are made. The warning signals are there to see. We can either continue to ignore the unique needs of this population or recognize the need to address this distinct level of schooling as we move into education reform for the 1990s and beyond.

This plan provides a blueprint for transforming the education of young adolescents. The hope is that this plan will bridge the gap or mismatch

between the organization and curriculum of middle grades and the intellectual, emotional and interpersonal needs of young adolescents. Implementation of the recommendations requires the energy and commitment of all resources if we are to be successful. While the plan is ambitious and creates a sense of urgency, it is realized that change cannot be rushed and must be pushed forward with a steady pace. We stand ready to move from the planning to the implementation stage with the same energy and devotion that was generated by this year of inquiry.

The Vision for Right in the Middle

The citizens of the State of Illinois will be committed to ensuring excellence in middle-level education by meeting the unique developmental needs of young adolescents. These needs must shape the focus and structure of middle-level education. Meeting these needs will require coordination of all school and community resources.

Goals for Right in the Middle

Districts and schools will be the implementors of sound middle-level practices. Through collaborative efforts at the state level, leadership will be provided and the pace for change set. The goals for *Right in the Middle* are clear. To have a healthy, effective citizenry in Illinois, the State must:

1. Set the standards for what it considers to be effective middle-level education based on the developmental needs of young adolescents.

2. Support local schools as they seek to adopt the new vision of middle-level education.

3. Work to facilitate the coordination of resources at the state, school and community levels in order to ensure success for every student.

To these ends, *Right in the Middle* calls for action at the state and local levels to achieve its goals.

RECOMMENDATION I: The State Board of Education recognizes the uniqueness of middle-level education as a distinct level of schooling and will seek to improve it by allocating the necessary human and fiscal resources needed to effect changes.

"Middle grade schools— junior high, intermediate, and middle schools - are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift, and help every young person thrive during early adolescents. Yet all too often these schools exacerbate the problems of young adolescents."
Turning Points

"Education at the middle level is today's front line in our war for the minds of our youth. The middle level may be one last chance to reach the alienated, encourage the inquisitive and challenge the achieving. We must put all resources necessary into this true battle for the minds of our youth."
Savario Mungo, President, Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools

"Do we believe that all kids can be educated? If we have the commitment, we can't expect to do the same things the same way. We must examine the structure and organize and provide services based on the developmental needs of students."
Dorothy Magett, Associate Superintendent, Illinois State Board of Education

Illinois Middle-Level Assessment/ Inquiry Data:

Many good intentions were expressed in the Focus Groups, and excellent ideas for changing the future were shared. However, participants expressed the need for high level state assistance if true, lasting changes are to occur. Some were skeptical of what the initiative would truly accomplish because of past experiences where support was not forthcoming. Participants wanted support in terms of time, money and opportunity for staff development. Some system needs to be created to help schools undertaking change. Schools need to network and work together to accomplish these goals.

Assumptions:

The Illinois State Board of Education has the responsibility to do everything it can to support local school districts' efforts to achieve their expected outcomes.

The Illinois State Board of Education has the fundamental belief that society and all who learn must be provided with no less than a high-quality, fully integrated education system.

The Illinois State Board of Education is committed to providing quality service and technical assistance to all schools.

Action I:

The State Board of Education will initiate and execute the following activities:

1. Develop a state system of support to improve middle-level education.

Schools will be better able to receive the technical assistance needed to alter their school organization and program as the State Board of Education provides appropriate staff leadership and adequate financial resources to do so.

As it stands currently, without strong leadership, only 19% of Illinois schools serving grades 5-8 have fully implemented the use of interdisciplinary teams. Thirty-three percent of schools with at least some implementation of team teaching have a common daily planning time for the teams. Twenty-three percent of all schools report having an advisor-advisee or school-based guidance program.

2. Provide incentives and adequate resources for schools implementing middle-level educational practices.

   Motivation to change is important. For schools, motivation frequently translates into incentives and resources. Schools demonstrating willingness to change need resources that support the change process. *Right in the Middle* advocates reform unbounded by a school's current financial situation. In particular, extensive staff development must be provided. Adequate resources, incentives and opportunities must be made available to the middle level to initiate these needed reforms.

3. Incorporate effective middle-level practices into the indicators and standards of the new state regulatory system.

   Right in the Middle professes that education at the middle level is different from elementary and secondary education. The differences must be reflected in the regulatory process. The middle-level school of the future must be evaluated upon a revised view of schooling in the middle and reflect those exemplary practices we know are needed by our children.

4. Develop a public relations campaign to communicate and rigorously advocate the significance of creating transformed middle-level schools.

   Beyond information to schools, middle-level education must be viewed by the public as a rightful partner in the educational schema taking its place as the middle level between elementary and secondary. The public must become familiar with the place and promise of middle-level education. Additionally, efforts must be initiated to explain the importance of the smooth transition of students. Elementary and high schools must know the reasons for this special middle-level program and the viability of its practices.

5. Publish informational material about effective middle-level components, establish guidelines about essential middle-level curriculum and age-appropriate instructional practices, prepare an inventory of resources available to middle-level education, and create a directory of exemplary middle-level programs.

   Parents, school boards, schools and educators must have a working knowledge about the kinds of changes desired and the reasons for the changes. Practitioners must have ready access to information about innovations most effective to improving middle-level education. They must not only know what is expected of them, but also see how the changes can be implemented.

6. Designate a middle-level research and development component to create the atmosphere for innovation. *Right in the Middle* charges schools with the task of matching school practices to the intellectual, social, emotional and physical needs of students. When that is accomplished, schools will be different and will need to be evaluated against different standards to measure school effectiveness. Analysis of the adoption process will generate helpful information for schools undertaking the middle-level changes. Periodic checkpoints of the magnitude of changes implemented will be needed in order to determine the extent to which *Right in the Middle* describes accepted practices.

RECOMMENDATION II: The State Board of Education will enable the 18 Educational Service Centers to provide middle-level professional development and create networks of schools which redesign their curriculum, organization and instruction using effective middle-level education research and practices.

"To ensure that all students learn, the educational program must be shaped to fit the needs of students by: grouping students for learning, scheduling classroom periods to maximize learning, and expanding the structure of opportunity for learning."
Turning Points

"Middle grades education can vastly improve middle grade curricula and instruction programs by: teaching young adolescents to think critically, develop healthful lifestyles, and to be active citizens; integrating subject matter across disciplines; and teaching students to learn as well as to test successfully."
Turning Points

"The most direct way to improve education is to improve the personal effectiveness of individual teachers."
John Lounsbury

Illinois Middle-Level Assessment/ Inquiry Data:

The concept of flexible block scheduling which allows classroom periods to maximize learning is the key concept implemented least often among the schools. Sixty-two percent of the schools have no plan to implement this concept, and only 3.5 percent have full implementation. The two most well-documented approaches that achieve the goal of effectively teaching students of diverse ability and differing rates of learning (often claimed as the purpose for tracking), cooperative learning and cross age tutoring, are fully implemented in 14% of schools. Professional development was consistently not provided to staff in the areas of cultural sensitivity, interagency collaboration, advisor/ advisee programs, teaming, early adolescent development, and inquiry type learning. The most frequently provided area of professional development was computerized instruction.

Focus group participants consistently believed that alternative and flexible opportunities will need to be available to meet the individual school and district needs. Extensive, experimental systems with ongoing support must be encouraged within the state where over a period of time teachers take ownership for redesigning their schools. Schools need help finding ways to inservice parents, community members and board members about middle-level education's place and promise for education of the future.

Assumptions:

- ► Changes in curriculum, instruction and organization will vastly increase the odds of success for every young adolescent.
- ► The 18 Educational Service Centers are the vehicle established by the Illinois State Board of Education to provide professional development opportunities to schools.
- ► Learning is a lifelong process for everyone and requires a continuing, sustained professional development system.
- ► There should be a direct relationship to how systems of higher education prepare our teachers and what schools expect teachers to know and be able to do.

Action II:

A communication/technology network of "schools helping schools" to assist schools as they implement the recommendations in this report will be established. The network of schools would include at least one "lead" school that would serve as the training site for the regional network. Schools wishing to change practices would work collaboratively with this Center and the lead school. The Center will coordinate its efforts in conjunction with the middle-level efforts of the Illinois State Board of Education.

1. A Center Professional Development Committee would be created with representatives from participating schools to include both teachers and administrators, regional institutions of higher education, regional youth and community service organizations, health and social service agencies, parents and the Education Service Center.
2. The purpose of the Committee, in addition to professional development, would be to foster integration of services and assist schools in defining the role and responsibilities of each stakeholder in providing effective middle grades practices through school-based planning. Strategies for encouraging parental and community involvement, strategies for student transition, relationship to the state goals for learning, strategies for integrating health and social service, etc., would be some of the areas addressed in school-based planning.
3. The Committee would coordinate the staff development opportunities needed by the regional schools and advocate the need for improved middle-level education. Staff development would occur in such areas as interdisciplinary team organization, advisor/ advisee, exploration, curriculum integration, integration of services and instructional strategies.
4. Coordination with the regional colleges and universities for pre-service educational opportunities at the network schools would be another function of the Centers. Pre-service teachers could learn about middle-level students and practices by using the network schools as training sites. Institutions of higher education would prepare the students for these experiences.

RECOMMENDATION III: The State of Illino is will strongly urge local schools to employ teachers in middle-level education who are specially educated to teach young adolescents.

"The matter of licensure or certification presents an opportunity to increase the numbers and strengthen the quality of middle-grade teachers consonant with procedures currently in place."
Turning Points

"We need to concentrate on the quality and content of the training that is necessary to prepare expert teachers of young adolescents."
Lee Betterman, President, Illinois Education Association

"A middle grade endorsement could be valuable for three reasons. First, it would recognize the special talents and training of a teacher who has decided to teach young adolescents. Second, it would encourage schools of education to offer specialized courses for the middle grades. Third, it would provide a fully legitimate status for middle grade teachers."
Turning Points

Illinois Middle-Level Assessment/ Inquiry Data:

Common to the focus groups was unanimous agreement that if the school-related needs are to be met, young adolescents need teachers who have been selected and trained specifically for middle-level school. Those teachers need to be more committed to teaching students than to teaching content. They also need to be people with a great deal of patience and a good sense of humor. ♦ Illinois' teachers are certified for either elementary or secondary school. In junior high/middle schools, 28% of teachers have elementary (K-9) certificates and 55% have secondary (6-12) certificates, while another 15% have special certificates to teach art, music or PE. This data excludes Chicago.

Twenty-three states offer an additional endorsement or separate certificate for teaching in middle grades.

Assumptions:

- The preparation of knowledgeable, well-qualified teachers is important.
- Teachers in middle-level education need different skills and knowledge than they currently are receiving in their preparation programs.
- It is the responsibility of the StateBoard of Education and the Board of Higher Education to ensure that teachers are well prepared.
- Administrators play an important role in selecting teachers who have the skills, knowledge and attitude to prepare our young adolescents to be productive, responsible citizens.

Action III:

New teachers must be aware of the developmental needs of young adolescents, of strategies available to them as middle-level educators, of middle-level practices to meet the needs of the student, and of the role of the middle-level teacher in the transformed middle-level school. The State Board of Education, in consultation with the Illinois State Teacher Certification Board, will review and revise its requirements, as appropriate, to ensure that the following courses and experiences are offered in teacher preparation programs:

1. Nature and needs of young adolescents;
2. Middle-level philosophy, curriculum and instruction;
3. Assessing, coordinating and referring students to health and social services;
4. Clinical experiences appropriate to the age level;
5. Designing and teaching interdisciplinary, developmentally appropriate programs of study;
6. Principles of guidance.

In addition, the Illinois State Teacher Certification Board will advise the Illinois State Board of Education on the appropriate certification or endorsement requirements to carry out this action. ♦ The Illinois State Board of Education, in consultation with the Illinois State Teacher Certification Board, will prepare and include middle level preparation questions to be asked during the written and on-site five year program review process for colleges and universities.

RECOMMENDATION IV: The Governor's office will serve as the lead agency in organizing collaboration with other state agencies responsible for early adolescent welfare.

"Society has expanded its expectations of schools from meeting just academic needs of students to also addressing their social, health and welfare needs. It is our obligation to see that the government social service agencies work together to the best advantage of children and their families."
Bob Kustra, Lieutenant Governor, Illinois

"The Governor's office is key to successfully integrating services. He can create collaboration of the Commissioners of the various state agencies by requiring meetings, assigning staff and requiring change."
Ed Tettleman, Assistant Commissioner for Intergovernmental Affairs, New Jersey Department of Human Services

"State governments have become increasingly sophisticated and active arenas for policy innovation."
Senator Charles Bruner, Des Moines, Iowa

Illinois Middle-Level School Assessment/ Inquiry Data:

A handful of state and local efforts to encourage collaboration are currently underway across the nation (New Jersey, Iowa, San Diego, Kentucky, etc.). Common elements of the strategies being used can be identified. These are:

1. Substantial incentives are offered to develop collaboration.
2. Programs are administered flexibly, often with the state reducing "red tape" policies and rules.
3. Support in the form of technical assistance, guidance, and encouragement is provided.
4. Client-centered objectives are developed which produce demands for cross-agency initiatives.
5. Professional development is crucial.
6. Evaluation is geared to outcome measures.

Assumptions:

- The primary focus is on prevention.
- The utilization and building on service delivery structure requires open communication.
- There should be ready access to the entire constellation of needed services.
- There must be a holistic view of the child and family.
- There should be improved cost-effectiveness of and accountability for delivering services.

Action IV:

In collaboration with the Governor's Coordination of Social Services Action Group, the following objectives will be accomplished:

1. Identify where integration of services should occur and where duplication of services could be eliminated.
2. Identify key program components and offer joint services and training, e.g. healthy life styles, life skills.
3. Identify policies which contribute and inhibit the effective integration of services and take the necessary action to promote, revise or eliminate them.
4. Define the roles and responsibilities of each agency in meeting the needs of young adolescents.
5. Fund experimental local programs which promote integration of services.

RECOMMENDATION V: School districts will examine effective middle-level practices, curriculum and instruction to determine their appropriateness for meeting the needs of all students but specifically the needs of young adolescents. The school district employees will collectively set the agenda for change after actively seeking input from all facets of the community to be served.

- "The skill I want students leaving Illinois schools to have is to be employable. Employability means having the following skills:

  — The Ability to Learn/Explore
  academic
  execution or performance skills

  — The Ability to Adapt
  relationship, listening, negotiation, teamwork skills

  — The Ability to Grow
  responsibility, integrity, self-development and motivation skills

  I will teach or train for the specific job from that point forward." Michael Skarr, Vice President, West Central Division, Northern Illinois Gas Company

Illinois Middle-Level Assessment/ Inquiry Data:

Of the key concepts considered to be critical success factors to the reform of middle grades education, sizeable percentages of schools report no plan for implementation. Specifically,

- 62% have no plans to implement block scheduling;
- 41% have no plans to offer common planning time for teachers;
- 33% have no plans to offer community service options;
- 29% have no plans to create interdisciplinary teams;

- 46% have no plans to offer intramural sports;
- 26% have no plans to implement advisor-advisee programs;
- 23% have no plans to provide an integrated curriculum;
- 23% have no plans to implement an exploratory concept of learning opportunities; and
- 22% have no plans to implement the teaching of multiple subject areas.
- Only 27% of schools have fully given teachers control over instructional methods, class scheduling, and student evaluation.
- Only 12% of schools have fully implemented critical thinking skills in the curriculum through teaching methods which foster a spirit of inquiry, problem solving, and communication of ideas.
- Additionally, outside of Chicago only 24% of the schools report that teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, students, and community representatives participate fully in shared decision making. For Chicago, that percentage is 70%.

Assumptions:

The curriculum should be based on knowledge, skills, and attitudes which students will need to function and to succeed in the future.

Instructional practices should actively engage students in the educational process and demonstrate relevance to real-life experiences.

Every student should have someone in the school who knows and cares about him/her.

A collectively developed vision, goals and strategies will direct instructional, organizational and curriculum efforts.

Those affected by decisions should take part in the decision-making process and be held accountable for the outcomes.

Action V:

A process to examine, explore and implement effective middle grades practices will be developed. An outcome of this process will be a local philosophy and vision for middle grades education. Plans for implementing instructional improvement will be included in local school improvement plans. An assessment of the state's ability to impact the implementation of effective practices will be undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION VI: School districts and schools need to develop ways of effectively engaging families in the education of their young adolescents.

"Trying to educate children without the involvement of the family is like trying to play a basketball game without all the players on the court."
Senator Bill Bradley, New Jersey

"Families must be empowered to become advocates for their children in schools."
Dorothy Magett, Associate Superintendent, Illinois State Board of Education

"It is true that parents are their children's first teachers but they must remain involved throughout their children's education. They just can't drop them off at the school house door."
Gretchen McDowell, President, Illinois Parent Teacher Association

Illinois Middle-Level Assessment/ Inquiry Data:

Outside of Chicago, only 10% of the schools report full implementation of parent participation in school governance. Within Chicago 81% of the schools report full implementation of this concept. Regardless of location, parenting classes are only 14% fully implemented in middle grades with 25% of schools reporting no plan to implement. Also, teachers are only moderately prepared to work " with children from one- or two-parent families, families of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, and families who for economic or other reasons are undergoing stress that may influence their children's performance." Only 18% of the schools report full implementation of this concept. The degree of parent involvement in their children's education steadily declines as the children move from elementary to middle to secondary education.

Assumptions:

- Families want the best for their children.
- The school cannot do it alone.
- Families are a key resource in their child's education.

Action VI:

Schools and communities have at their disposal tools that can engage families. Mutual planning efforts are needed to bring this into reality. A process to assist schools in assuring meaningful family involvement will be developed. This process will include:

1. Identification of family involvement as a school-wide priority.

   This may include written policies; funding; staff and family training; necessary materials and facilities; and food, transportation and child care to insure active participation.

2. Inclusion of families as partners with the school and community so all stakeholders have a sense of ownership.

   Types of involvement and activities are planned jointly, and activities address issues of concern to the community.

3. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities which are not inflexible.

   Training is provided to both staff and families to help them understand their roles and responsibilities and learn ways to collaborate effectively; two-way communication exists; a variety of media and activities to engage families are used; a wide variety of culturally appropriate opportunities are available for families to become involved; and families participate in ongoing evaluation and revision of activities.

RECOMMENDATION VII: School districts and schools in conjunction with community agencies need to develop a plan and process for community-school interaction.

"It matters far less what happens at the state level than at the county level. The school should be the center for the provision of all services which affect the child and family."
Jeff Buhrmann, Education Assistant, Department of Children and Family Services

"Schools have become, and remain, the one central, consistent, community institution which can be relied upon for the most part to provide a safe place where needs can be assessed and services can be provided. You can't separate social and economic problems of children from their education attainment and from the outcomes of education."
Martin Gerry, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services

When William Sutton, professional bank robber, was asked, "Why do you rob banks?," he replied, "because that's where the money is." Many ask, "why schools," the reply, "because that's where the kids are."

Illinois Middle-Level Assessment/ Inquiry Data:

The area of professional development offered least often among the schools responding was interagency collaboration (offered by only 18% of the schools). Timely and effective community collaborations to increase access of young adolescents to needed health and social services exist fully in 22% of junior high/middle schools and 17% in K-8 schools. The use of local agencies to coordinate with the school in assisting students to achieve their goals are implemented in 16% of junior high/middle schools and 22% of K-8 schools. Community service is fully implemented into the core instructional program in only 6% of the schools responding. Only 12% of schools report full implementation of business partnerships for the contribution of time, money and other resources.

Assumptions:

- Each agency must retain its area of responsibility while helping each other to provide the best services.
- Essential components of a middle grades integrated services initiative include recreation, health, community service, social services, diagnostic services, family opportunities, career opportunities, and youth service organizations.
- There should be a single point of contact for children and families.
- The focus should be on prevention.

Action VII:

The pressing needs of young adolescents extend beyond the schoolhouse door. Needs must be addressed in a unified manner. Models of integrated services will be developed which share the goals of:

1. Identifying existing community services.
2. Investigating children and family needs and attitudes toward available services.
3. Determining perceived and actual barriers to service as identified by the families and line workers.

4. Understanding the perspectives and attitudes of agency staff and service providers.

5. Developing alternative strategies and approaches to responding to families'/ communities' needs, particularly in the area of prevention.

6. Developing closer working relationships among agencies in order to bring about institutional change.

7. Creating avenues for community service opportunities for students.

Summary

Through these actions and the resulting improved, coordinated services to young adolescents, the State of Illinois will produce healthier, more academically and socially competent students who are better able to meet the academic and social challenges which lie ahead. The time to meet the challenges of the future is now, and it is our responsibility and commitment to do so.

APPENDIX A
Background

Right in the Middle originated out of the efforts of the Illinois Middle Grade Planning Initiative funded in part through a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. In June of 1990, Illinois was one of twenty-seven (27) states to receive a 15-month Carnegie Middle Grade Policy Planning Grant. The contents of the report are the result of extensive inquiry and planning by the Middle Grades Task Force. The Task Force was composed of persons representing varying interests associated with middle-level education including teachers, principals, counselors, superintendents, allied association members and advocates, teacher educators, and health professionals.

Members of the Task Force talked with hundreds of persons interested in the well-being of young adolescents during an intensive week of Focus Group Meetings. They received information about current practices of middle-level schools from a comprehensive statewide survey of all schools educating students in grades five to eight. Several thousand students wrote their opinions about what their education should be like. The Task Force worked to understand the complex needs of young adolescents, their schools and their communities. Their sense of commitment to this project is commendable.

The Task Force submitted *Right in the Middle* to the Advisory Board for the Planning Initiative. This Advisory Board was chaired by Robert Leininger, State Superintendent of Education, and was comprised of leaders from all of the state's major educational organizations, state agencies and Governor's office. The Advisory Board served as the final review board for the document.

The Illinois State Board of Education wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools for its efforts and support throughout this planning initiative.

The outstanding leadership exhibited by the Association and its members in promoting and improving middle level education is commendable. Without such expertise, the task of creating a plan to transform Illinois' middle grades schools would have been far greater. The Illinois State Board appreciates the Association's continuing commitment.

APPENDIX B

Middle Level Education Advisory Board

The Honorable James Edgar
Governor

Designee: Mary Ann Louderback
Executive Assistant for Education

Lee Betterman
President
Illinois Education Association

Jeff Buhrmann
Special Assistant for Interagency Coordination
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Amy Creekmore
Student - Alton Community Unit School District #11
Illinois State Student Advisory Council

Linda Edwards
School Health Liaison
Illinois Department of Public Health

Robert Leininger
State Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education

Gretchen McDowell
President
Illinois Congress of Parents and Teachers

Lorraine Miller
Orland Park School District #135
Pupil Personnel Services Advisory Board

Jack Moomey
Executive Director
Illinois Principals Association

Savario Mungo
President
Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools

Wayne Sampson
Executive Director
Illinois Association of School Boards

Thomas G. Scullen
Superintendent
Indian Prairie Community Unit School District #204

Jacqueline Vaughn
President
Illinois Federation of Teachers

Richard Wagner
Executive Director
Illinois Board of Higher Education

John Wargo
Executive Director
Illinois Association of School Administrators

APPENDIX C

Middle Level Education Task Force

Jenece Brown
Teacher
Edwardsville Community Unit School District #7

Joe Crawford
Middle School Principal
Crete-Monee Community Unit School District #201

Bill Creswell
Director, Project Drug Free
University of Illinois

Bettye Endicott
School Health Consultant
Illinois State Board of Education

Earnestine Foster
Principal
Matteson Elementary School District #162

Diane Frame
Middle School Counselor
Batavia Unit School District #101

Diane Gray
Media Director
Winnetka School District #36

Bob Green
Parents Too Soon Coordinator
Illinois Department of Public Health

Ted Groat
Teacher
Barrington Community Unit School District #220

Tom Gunning
Middle School Principal
Alton Community Unit School District #11

Angie Herrera
Teacher
City of Chicago Public Schools #299

Linda Holdorf
Teacher
Indian Prairie Community School District #204

Deborah Kasak
Project Consultant
Illinois State Board of Education

Jim McClard
Principal
Gibson City Community Unit School District #1

Yvonne Minor
Principal
City of Chicago Public Schools #299

Barbara O'Brien
Teacher
Pekin Public School District #108

Carol Parker
Field Coordinator
Illinois Association of School Boards

Sheryl Poggi
Manager
Illinois State Board of Education

Joseph Pollack
Superintendent
Evanston School District #65

Barbara Sartain
Project Director
Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools

M. Bunny Shupe
Project Director
Illinois Caucus on Teenage Pregnancy

Joseph L. Trimmer
Principal
Cumberland School District #77

Julie Triplett
Director
Educational Service Center

Lynn Troute
Technical Training Representative
Illinois State Board of Education

Jerry Walker
Professor
University of Illinois

Bette Wilson
Urban and Ethnic Education
Illinois State Board of Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
100 North First Street, Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001

Louis Mervis, *Chairman*
Robert Leininger, *State Superintendent*

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer
Printed by the Authority of the State of Illinois February 1992 7.5M 2.54B.25 No. 476

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No.
805
Springfield, IL